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FORWARD OR BACKWARD?



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## FORWARD OR BACKWARD ?

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As one of the first acts of the Slaveholder in this rebellion was to destroy the lighthouses, so now he is endeavoring to extinguish the lamp of that great beacon, the American democracy, which sheds the light of freedom and hope to the bondsman and the poor, and points out the peaceful, sheltered haven within. No more will that haven exist for them, when it shall be filled with the raging waves of internal strife. For what limit can be set to future divisions and combinations, if we once allow the establishment of another nation within our old borders? What shall be the boundary line between the Southern Confederacy and ourselves? Who will *we* be? What will the yet loyal Border States do when they find that the Free States have quailed before the Slaveholder? Their institutions, prejudices, family-ties, will all contribute to make them gravitate toward the Southern nation, when interest in the preservation of the Union shall no longer incline them to remain in the old federation.

Can the Free States repeat the farce (or rather tragedy) of putting a second veto on secession? The threat of compulsion would be scorned did the poor, crest-plucked North feebly meditate such a thing. Will distant California be content to remain in her old position, separated, as she may be, from the Free States, by territories no longer under their rule? Will not her bold spirits aspire to shape a Pacific Federation? So, the process of disintegration may continue, till the name American shall have lost its distinctive force and political significance.

Moreover, as the triumph of the nation, and the destruction of slavery, will work a thorough and ennobling change in the social and political condition of the country, elevating its standard of humanity, thought, and action, thus purifying parties, and making their aims grander and broader—so with the vic-

tory of the Slaveholder, the wriggling spawn of slavery and corruption, from the slime of whose trail no place in the land has escaped—the minion and apologist of treason, whose truckling nourished rebellion—the pot-house politician, who follows in his wake, at the North; the man of broken fortunes—the adventurer—the desperado—the politician, cankered by loss of place—the cabinet-minister, and the soldier, unfaithful to their oath—the peculator—the repudiator—at the South; all these will leap into the high places of power on this continent, and control its destinies. “Wheresoever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.” Disunion would have been their joint work, and rule would be their prerogative.

America would make bitter atonement for her defection in permitting the dissolution of the Union, in the internal jealousies, intrigues, strifes, of her different communities, and in the opportunity given to the foreigner, which he would not fail to seize, to fan those fires for his own warmth. Union pledges peace at home, and its invulnerable front frowns off war from without. *L'Union c'est la force*, says the motto of Belgium—Union is strength; Union is peace, may America add. It is our very life. It means civilization, progress—all future hope for the continent.

This is that famous stone  
That turneth all to gold.

In our homogeneity of institutions and laws, is the key of the strides of that civilization which has done the work of a thousand years of old empire in a century; has built vast cities and planted knowledge and refinement in the solitudes, and with its mild but potent rule, evoked order in the wilderness as by a charm. Uninterrupted by barriers of national feeling and interest, the smooth-flowing current of trade, travel and emigration, bears noiselessly its burdens, ever working itself new channels, till the wide-sundered parts of the nation share alike in one civilization.

Union is the only hope for the South, of regeneration and rescue from barbarism, for into barbarism it has been gradually lapsing. There exist forms of it in the Slave States not to be paralleled in any civilized country. These, instead of being obliterated by the lapse of time and the spread of enlighten-

ment, seem to take a more tenacious hold ; for it is the peculiarity of slave civilization (if such phrase be allowable) to be retrogressive instead of progressive. It is not accumulative as free society, but exhaustive. It is not permanent as free society, but transitory. It cultivates the soil only to leave it worse than it found it, and moves away to curse with barrenness anew. Its system of agriculture, instead of gathering about it steadily, for generation on generation, the means of civilization, building villages, and storing up the appliances of refinement and comfort, discourages such results. Add to this peculiarity the blighting influence of slavery on manners and thought, and it will be seen how futile it is to expect education, comfort, letters, art—the thousand luxuriant growths and blossoms of free society—to flourish in such soil. Moreover, the moral tone of the South has steadily declined since the passing away of their great anti-slavery men, and the rise of the new school, who proclaim slavery a good. Much has a nation's tone of thought to do with its virtue. Guizot quotes a saying of Rousseau, "I like a bad action better than a bad principle," with the remark : "He is right ; a bad deed may remain isolated, a bad principle is always fruitful ; for, after all, it is the mind which governs, and man acts after his thought much oftener than he himself believes." What more simple ? A man's belief must, in the long run, reveal itself in his habit of life. If the national ideal be low, debasement of the national condition follows in logical sequence.

The South gives the lie to the human race, proclaiming its boasted wisdom to be but folly, and, rejecting the hard-won fruits of experience of free society, tells it that its results go but to show that it is built on delusion ; that, so far from advancing toward the goal of truth, it every day recedes from it ; that, to reach it, it has only to return whence it started, and find a resting-place in a system of barbarous days.

When a people goes forth from the father's house, and seeks an establishment of its own, who expects it to build its dwelling of worm-eaten timbers, and assume, as its faith and principle of life, the creed outworn of distant ancestors ? Oh, old young nation, rotten without having been ripe, we look to you for the

blossoms of the spring, and find but the withered husks of winter.

Is it to establish such a state, that you are trying to overthrow the American Union? Swift died too soon when he wrote:

“Sure such a fool was never found  
To pull a palace to the ground,  
Only to have its ruins made  
Materials for a house decayed.”

Was ever like anomaly? Sophists of old days, welcome a whole nation of brothers to aid you in your task of confusing right and wrong; a nation who would persuade us that slavery is the foundation of freedom; that society is healthy and right-minded, only when in it there is one class who labor without reward for the good of another; that, to deprive a man of the fruits of his toil, and to deny him the rights of family, is to teach him the knowledge and practice of justice and virtue; that to keep him in ignorance, and to forbid him to rise in the social scale is to christianize him; and that one class is improved by the degradation of another. The South tells the North that it is a race of fanatics. Was ever wilder fanaticism than that which has summoned the South from its homes? but lacking the only features which lend dignity to fanaticism, disinterestedness, and a wish to benefit mankind.

It would almost seem as if every evil principle, every wrong, every weight which mankind has been gradually casting off in its race, were to find their resting-place and embodiment in the Slaveholder's government; and as if we were to behold in it the realization of that fancy of the Orientals, which relates how the atoms of evil are hovering in the atmosphere, waiting for the hour when, summoned together by a potent spell, they shall be coagulated into one gigantic shape of wickedness, which will descend to earth to wreak its malice on mankind.

When the nation triumphs, the present war will be worth all its expenditure of blood and money, for the benefits which it will confer on the South, in the complete upheaval of its society. No greater curse for the slaveholding States, than to say to them, “Do your will, go from us.” Then on that land would close, as

before the rebellion had begun to set in, a polar night of ignorance, brutality, decay of invention, decline of the democratic principle, and general degeneration—made fearful and hideous by the distant rumbling sounds of—negro-massacre.

Nor less sad the effect which might be looked for after the rending of the Union, on the American character. From an united nation, in the main peaceful, and devoting its labor and invention to the works of peace, we would become a collection of turbulent peoples, each uneasy as to its neighbor's designs, with minds unhinged by constant jar, and vexed with warlike thoughts. It would be impossible for the American character not to share in all these vicissitudes. We are now a freedom-loving, sturdy, sedate, peaceful nation, displaying to their extreme those qualities which mark the English race, and to which they owe their foremost place in the world; and it is, doubtless, difficult for us to believe that we can become divested of those attributes, since there is so much hardness at the base of the national character, not easily moulded by circumstance, but moulding it. But one need not be a deep student of history to realize the possibility of such consummation. The Romans, the Venetians, from vigorous, well-balanced nations, sank into pliant, feeble, and shifting ones. The contrast in our case would not be greater, than was in theirs, between that which they were, and that which they became. The change was as marvellous and difficult to be believed beforehand, in their case as in ours, yet it ensued. The abandonment of the Union will show that the great principles of life have lost their hold on us, and that the bright high spirit of the nation has become dulled and lowered. This loss of high spirit is the first symptom of the decline of the national character, and with this ensues decay of all national grandeur. The nation no longer thinks greatly, and its listlessness attacks all quarters, enterprise, invention, letters, art, and every greatness, material or abstract. If we basely succumb, a few generations may see us dwarfed from a fiery, ingenious people, bold to conceive and execute, stout-hearted, great-minded, law-loving, to a listless, shifting, uncultivated multitude—puny in thought, and petty in design; ever remorseful in their inner hearts for their shameful defection, and haunted by vain longings for the great heritage which they squandered in their wanton indifference.

On the other hand, the doing of great deeds ripens a nation's heart and understanding, and the vivifying force which springs from it, blossoms in every sort of growth. The Revolution and the formation of the Union, were a wonderful development for the American mind; and the success of the great work which the nation is endeavoring to-day, will raise it to new levels, and advance it to the accomplishment of all things which make a nation memorable. When the baneful poison which has preyed on the life of America, envenoming and shrivelling manliness and thought, shall be cast out, its new, luxuriant health will instil fresh energies and powers into the renovated frame.

How would democracy fare through all these changes of the nation? It would probably, with more or less modification, according to events and the characteristics of the respective peoples, be the polity of the various American powers, excepting the slaveholding power. The Slaveholder has ever distrusted democracy, for he knows it is his foe. The structure of his society, where labor is vile, and the laborer degraded, where there is no wide-extended system of popular education, where the suffrage is limited, where social and political power lodges in the hands of the great land-owners, and whose polity, as Mr. Cairnes remarks, "must in essence be an oligarchy, whatever the particular mould be in which it is cast,"—this structure would seem to be the foundation of a governing caste in whom power should be fixed. An ambitious oligarchy, it would probably be, ever conspiring to lessen the political rights of the people, and dangerous to the freedom of the state, from its tenacious adherence to a single object, and from having no sturdy, stout-hearted middle-class, as that of England, to control and confront them.

So much for democracy at home. But whatever should be its fate in America, whether it should still retain its hold in the different powers; whether it should experience such modification as to become a changed thing; whether it should be the polity of some states, and be rejected by others—with the fall of the Union it has lost its stronghold. In Switzerland, after the shocks and strains of five hundred years, it still keeps its own, pure and free; but there its example is not backed by power, as here; so potent a reasoner is right when linked with might. Democracy, its opposers say, may answer for petty states—for the stage of a

nation when it is poor, simple, and unambitious ; where it has to deal with fierce contending parties, with extended dominion, with turbulent passions, its lack of strong central power makes itself evident—it may flourish for a time, and accomplish great results in its day, but it is continually sowing the seeds of its own downfall, producing a licentiousness which finally destroys its parent. Its constructive faculty is great, its conservative naught. Democrats of Ameriea, give them the lie. They point to us and our troubles for a confirmation of their arguments, and long impatiently for our downfall, that their theories may become established opinions. Meanwhile, the doubting wait to see if democracy have faith and strength enough to maintain itself, for if an institution lack the faculty of self-preservation, it lacks all things. Though the downfall of the American Union would have come through the leaven of oligarchy which was hidden in it, till it leavened the whole mass, yet to democracy would be the shame and the blame. Men would sigh despairingly over another blasted hope, a vision which in their fondness they deemed a reality—an ideal condition of mankind, too delicate and spiritual to stand the rude shocks of the world. So would the good cause be put back for long years.

We stand toward the new world, as England has stood toward Europe, the leader of civil and religious freedom. Let us not vacate that proud place, by abandoning the Union. Let us not, in allowing the establishment of the Southern Confederacy, be responsible for the introduction of a nation able and ambitious to prey on the feeble governments of the tropic. Already the South has wielded the power of the American Union to gratify its hankerings, and would have done so still further, had not its lawless ambition been controlled by the sturdy justice of the North. The Slaveholder will be the evil monster of the New World—a rapacious, aggressive, unscrupulous power, whose exhaustive system of agriculture curses it with an insatiable craving for new territory. One benefit his turbulent and aggressive spirit might work, that he would unite the other nations of the continent into one cause of putting down a common enemy. With the rending of the Union, we will lose our weight in the New World, and be looked up to by its nations, neither as a protector nor as an example.

As America is democracy's stronghold, so is it the stronghold

of slavery ; and as our first revolution was a revolution not only for us but for the world, so will our second revolution be a revolution of negro-slavery wherever it exists. The downfall of that stronghold will resound as a voice of doom in the ears of the slaveholders of the West Indies, and of South America ; in the ears of the slaver and of the negro-hunting king—but it will fall on those of the black man in every land, a sweet blast of the evening-horn of release.

In a beautiful scene in the Divine Comedy, Dante represents Virgil and himself meeting in Purgatory a spirit, of whom they enquire the way. He answers not, but asks their country and condition. “My gentle leader,” says Dante, “commenced : Mantua—And the shade, before so reticent, sprang toward him, saying, Mantuan, I am Sordello of thy land. And the one embraced the other.”

Behold, Italy ! exclaims Dante, how this gentle spirit was moved by the sweet sound of the name of his land, to show such joy over his fellow-citizen. But now thy inhabitants are filled with hate toward each other. Search, oh wretched one ! thy sea-coast, and thy bosom within, whether any part of thee taste peace. Then he bids the Roman Emperor come from his German kingdom, and view how his Italian Empire is torn and tost, without a head and without union, the victim and the prey of intestine dissension and foreign intrigue.

Dante, a statesman as well as a poet, rising above party and province, longed passionately for an united Italy, in which he saw the only hope of peace and weal for his land. After five hundred years of a political condition, aptly figured by the words of the apostle, “clouds they are without water, carried about of winds ; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots,” Italy is restored to greatness and health in union.

Should the Slaveholder succeed in his attempt to destroy the American Union, we can imagine some American Dante, belonging to one of the states of the riven Union, bewailing in strains as melancholy and passionate as those of the Florentine, the condition of his beloved America. For no matter into how many divisions the Union might be rent, nor what internal strifes should set state against state, nor to which part of

the nation he might belong, to the thoughtful one of any them, there would be but one country, America. So Dante was Florentine by citizenship, but Italian by heart. And after long years, when their insensate rage had worked itself out, and their frantic folly stood apparent, the fragments would reunite as they have done in Italy.

Honor to the wise Englishmen, who, soaring above local feeling, and overlooking petty flaws and flecks, seek to lead their nation to the right understanding of the import of our second revolution, and to cheer us forward in our arduous task; worthy successors, and of the same stamp, of the great orator of the pen, of Puritan England, John Milton. Could he descend among us, he might again see the vision which offered itself to his eyes, of "a noble and puissant nation, rousing itself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks," and, "as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full mid-day beam." He, watching our struggle, might address to us his words: "Go on . . . O, nations, never to be disunited; be the praise and the heroic song of all posterity, . . . . other nations will then covet to serve ye, for lordship and victory are but the pages of justice and virtue . . . join your invincible might to do worthy and godlike deeds; and then he that seeks to break your Union, a cleaving curse be his inheritance to all generations."

Men of the Free States, choose your path. Two lie before you,—one, with its illusive portio of peace, opening through the portals of dishonor and shame, and stretching away to anarchy and ruin; the other, entered through toil and suffering, lightened by the consciousness of a land rescued from the clutches of barbarism, of the principles of freedom asserted, and leading to an order, a freedom, a prosperity and greatness, compared with which those of the past will have been but as the twilight to the noon. Remember what hangs on your choice, and that you make it not for yourselves only, but for far generations. Choose whether they shall look on one of the saddest sights which history will have to show, and of which they shall be the figures, of the American nation rent into rival peoples, quarrelsome and petty; distracted with internal unrest, and set together by foreign intrigue and interference, and made its sport; with the trade of the soldier established in its land—with its rivers

and great highways of intercourse interrupted by garrisons and custom-houses—in a word, bereft of all which made the Union grand and peculiar. Or choose whether they shall behold what seems to our imperfect ken, almost a vision of Arcadia and the age of gold, the spectacle of countless multitudes swarming without hindrance over this continent, building up state after state; their toil and thought all devoted to the works which support life, and the arts which beautify it; and united by common interest, common freedom, under one grand reign of peace and progress.

If you have to do your work with toil, waste, and suffering, yet it is no mean matter of congratulation, that Freedom has given to your generation the chance to do this great deed for her, and to gain a place in history on the level of that of the heroic men of the eighteenth century, equally great with them to maintain that which they established.

Is not the very cause of civilization involved in your war? If you succumb, will not mankind begin to doubt whether with its pristine simplicity, a people did not also lose its manhood, and whether all fancied progress in comfort, education, refinement, was not in reality a backward path from love of freedom? Better, they would say, the log-hut in the lonely clearing, with its narrow life, which at least nurtured endurance, than the painted house and mart of the city, where man's spirit droops and dwarfs; and they would point to the example of that people, who when they were poor and rude, smit with the love of freedom, in the force of their passion, bearding a strong monarchy, drove it from their land. Then when they had rested from their toil, with the accumulation of comfort and refinement, they became so enervated, that they had no longer left within them the stout heart and single mind to resist the despoiling of that possession, which the devotion of their uncultivated ancestors had won for them.

Remember that your contest is no vulgar strife for extent of domain, but that it is one of the world's great turning-points, and that its stakes are our very national life, the welfare of the North American continent, directly, and of the whole new world, indirectly, and of its countless millions of inhabitants, born and unborn, the cause of democracy, and of the poor and oppressed—the triumph of freedom over despotism, of good over evil.



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